

COUNCIL MOTION

18 April 2024

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Mike Morris MBE

SECONDED BY: Councillor Mike Prendergast

TITLE: Openreach Lack of Consultation with residents

Southport having a unique Victorian seaside townscape has been largely free of any overhead cables or above ground apparatus since the inception of Southport Corporation in 1867 except for the electrical tramways in 1900. Since the removal of the overhead wires for the tramways, Southport has enjoyed a visual amenity on its streets and townscape by having very few telegraph poles and overhead cables which would normally create a 'spiders web' spoiling the visual amenity of its streets for her residents. At present, most of Southport copper telephone infrastructure is buried 'direct in ground' and only very few streets have their telephone lines in ducting.

Network operators such as Openreach are exempt from requiring planning approval under 'Permitted Development' and are only required to inform the local authority one calendar month before requesting permits. The only consultation with residents and public is in the form of a paper notice pinned or taped to trees or lampposts in the vicinity of a new pole, often poorly placed so that it will not be read i.e. facing the road rather than pavement 28 days before permits are sought. There is no telephone number to call with objections neither an email address, only a postal address.

Consultation then takes place with the 'objectors' whereby Openreach listen to all objections only to end the 'consultation' with the fact that they will still erect poles where they are not wanted. When asked why they do not carry out area consultations in church halls etc, they state that they would receive too many objections!

Openreach started the roll out of FTTP from the Churchtown exchange using telegraph poles in February of this year. Residents of those roads which opposed the erection of poles, spoiling the visual amenities of their streets and possibly reducing property prices protested peacefully to raise their collective objections to the roll out by Openreach.

The Minister of State for Data and Digital Infrastructure Hon Julia Lopez MP wrote to Openreach and other fixed line operators on 15 March 2024 and stated.

" New telegraph poles should only be in cases where installing lines underground is not reasonably practicable, and only after ensuring that appropriate community

engagement has taken place and that the siting of new infrastructure will not cause obstructions to traffic or unduly impact the visible amenity of the local area”

This Council therefore resolves to:-

1. Urge Openreach to reconsider their decision to erect telegraph poles instead of ducting due to cost to preserve Southport’s townscape and visible amenity.
2. Contact Openreach and insist that the spirit of the Ministers letter of the 14th March 2024 is adhered to in regard to meaningful consultation with residents, and pause the roll out in Southport until the existing ‘cabinet and siting and pole siting Code of Practice of 2016 has been revised.
3. Support residents if the majority of the road or street do not want poles erected and write to OpenReach asking for a pause to the installation and call for a public meeting with those residents to establish an amicable resolution.
4. If the Council considers that any operator has breached health and safety conditions attached to any permit or is using unsafe working practices this will be raised with the operator immediately in the most robust terms and the Council will be mindful of this when granting any further permits and / or when considering whether any permits should be suspended.